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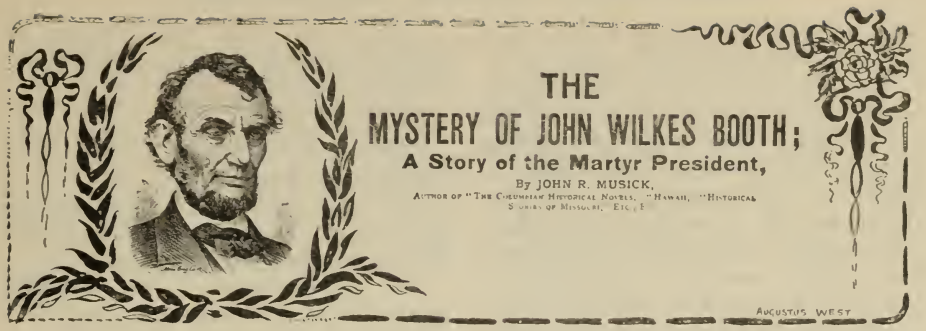

CHAPTER XI.

Booth and Claude.

With the surrender of General Lee, Claude Mitchell knew the War of the Rebellion was practically over. While Sherman was still pressing Johnson closely, and the President of the Southern Confederacy flying from the wrath to come, Claude reached his regiment, which had been ordered to Richmond, and thence to Washington. Only one day was allowed them in Richmond, and he determined to spend it in company with Bessie and her wounded brother. His joy at the dawn of peace was dimmed by the recollection that the being whom he loved more than life was one of the conquered. He hastened to Richmond, whither his regiment had gone, and at ten A. M. found his colonel, from whom he requested a leave of absence for a few hours.

"It seems to me, captain, you are requiring a great many leaves of absence lately," said the colonel.

"This will be the last, Colonel, and it is urgent."

"It is my opinion that the Army of the Potomac will soon be disbanded, and we will not be long required under military discipline."

"When do we start for Washington, Colonel?"

"At four."

"Give me permission to leave my command until three; then I will return."

The colonel gave him a curious look, winked, and smilingly said:

"See here, Captain, is there some little dark-eyed rebel snatching you away from duty?"

"No, Colonel. I assure you there is no little dark-eyed rebel, but there is a little blue-eyed angel somewhere in Richmond whom I must see at all risks." Then he told him of Bessie and her brother, and how riding with the advanced guard of Union soldiers, on entering Richmond he had found the town in flames, and Captain George Odell and his sister in great danger. He had removed them to a place of safety, and being anxious about his wounded friend wanted to go and learn something of him and his sister. The excuse was granted, and he started to find the house where George and Bessie had been left, and hastening up the steps, rang the bell.

A negro woman answered his summons.

"I came to see a wounded man," Claude explained. "A wounded Confederate officer."

"Which offersah, massa? Dar be seberal wounded men heah. Which ob dem do ye mean?"

"Captain Odell, who came here with his sister, Miss Bessie Odell!"

"Dey done gwine away."

"Gone!"

"Yes, massa; dat what I say; dey done gwine away."

"Gone where?"

"I dun know, massa."

"Can you learn from any other inhabitant of the house?"

"I'll try, massa. I send de missus

heah, an' may be she can tole ye 'bout it; cla' ter gracious I dun know."

The negress left him sitting in the parlor while she disappeared to find her mistress. After some ten or fifteen minutes, during which time Claude sat gazing at the portraits on the wall, there entered a woman about forty years of age. She had evidently seen better days; her hair, once black as the raven's wing, was considerably silvered, and her face, once handsome, now lined with care. She was a small, nervous, timid woman, who came hesitatingly into the apartment, as if she dreaded to look upon the face of a fellow being, and no wonder she was in dread of seeing a blue coat.

Some of the Union soldiers had been guilty of outrageous vandalism. Private houses had been robbed and burned, and helpless females in many instances insulted. Sometimes commissioned officers connived at such proceedings, and even aided the ruthless soldiers. Of course these rascals were in the minority, yet they were black enough to give a tinge of darkness, in the enemy's eyes, to the whole army.

No wonder the good woman trembled as she tottered into the presence of an officer with a blue coat.

"If you please, sir," she began, in a voice and manner indicating education and refinement, "won't you spare my house? We have suffered enough already. You killed my husband at Antietam, my oldest son at Gettysburg, and his only brother at Winchester. Now I am alone; won't you spare me and my property?"

"My good woman," said Claude, rising and cordially taking her hand in his own, "I have no intention whatever of harming you; I merely came to make some inquiry in regard to friends whom I left here on the day of the evacuation."

"There are several wounded here, but—but all Confederates," the woman timidly began.

"These particular people are Captain Odell of the Army of Virginia, and his sister Bessie."

"They are gone," the woman remarked, opening her eyes very wide.

"Gone where?"

"I do not know."

"But I thought his wound would preclude his going away?"

The pale little timid creature slid into one of the chairs and, folding her thin arms upon her breast, said:

"A young woman came, and they held an interview, and went away."

"How?"

"In a carriage; but it is my impression that after crossing the river they went to some station and took a train."

"It is very strange," said Claude, musingly. "You say a woman came."

"Yes, sir."

"A young woman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tall and dark?"

"A brunette, sir."

"With an air of mystery about her?"

"I don't know what it was, Captain, but there was something very strange. The young woman did not want to go."

"Did not want to go?" he asked, eagerly; "which young woman do you mean?"

"I mean the young woman named Bessie Odell. It seems she had promised to stay here until someone came back."

A sigh of infinite relief escaped the breast of poor Claude, who had begun to fear that Bessie was trying to avoid him. He thought such conduct would ill requite his devotion and sacrifice for her and her brother. But Bessie was true, and he was happy in the thought, though grieved at her strange disappearance. "Did he want to go?" Claude at last asked.

"I do not think he did, but the tall, dark young woman, so strangely beautiful, seemed to have a great influence over all of them, especially him."

Claude remembered having seen the actress, the mysterious Sybil, standing on the street corner. He remembered her wild looks and words, and felt his heart instinctively sink within him. If she controlled them, he feared it would be for evil. He recalled the warning

of Bessie at Louisville, and was deeply delving into the motives of this strange woman, when the lady of the house, in her timid, trembling voice, continued:

"I did not hear much they said, as the tall brunette seemed very reserved in her manner and words; but I supposed they were all personal friends, and it was right that they should go away."

"Perhaps it was," he answered, slowly and sadly. Then, rising, he bade the Southern lady adieu and took his departure. Claude was with his regiment at the appointed hour and all set out by rail for Washington to prepare for the grand review that was to take place previous to the mustering out of the vast Army of the Potomac. There was general rejoicing everywhere. All good men rejoiced that the war clouds were breaking away and the sunlight of peace was once more about to shine upon the earth.

On reaching Washington City, Claude made inquiry of every one whom he met for Bessie and her brother. He searched for George in the hospitals and among the prisoners but in vain.

On the night of the eleventh just referred to the whole city was radiating with joy and splendor over the victory. He had mingled with the crowd which gathered in front of the White House to listen to the speeches. He was disgusted with the agitators, who had done so little fighting, when they hissed and groaned at any allusion to clemency toward the South. They were a set of blunderers who wished to confiscate the Confederates' property to swell their own fortunes. They were neither patriots nor humanitarians. Had President Lincoln lived his humane course would have made him immensely unpopular with the plunderers.

Claude was busily thinking on the great subjects which at the beginning of the reconstruction period puzzled all right-minded thinking men, as he walked down a dark, narrow street. It was a late hour, and the theaters and places of amusement were closed. Suddenly he heard a shriek a little ahead of him, followed by oaths and blows, and then a female voice cried:

"Help! help! or they will kill Jack." He ran in the direction of the conflict and saw three or four ruffians fighting a soldier, whom they had knocked down to his knees, and who, though manfully defending himself, was getting the worst of the battle. By his side, or rather hovering on the outskirts of the conflict, putting in a hand here and there, was a pretty blue-eyed creature who could not have been more than nineteen or twenty years of age.

"Don't kill Jack! confound you rascals! You shan't hurt Jack!" she was shrieking, as with her pretty little hands she pulled their hair or beat their faces.

In a moment Claude was on the scene and struck right and left, sending the assaulting parties sprawling into the ditch and gutter. He heard rapid footsteps coming toward him, and supposed it police, but it proved to be a young man nearly his own age in citizen's clothes, but who joined him in putting the rowdies to flight.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Claude, as he helped the soldier to his feet.

The fellow, confused by liquor and pounding, was unable to answer at first; but the girl, as soon as she could regain her breath, said:

"Why, me an' Jack were comin' home from the theater an' them dog-on tangle-foot militia come a-tumblin' right in on Jack because he had reported on 'em at the theater."

"They done it, too," growled Jack, feeling about in the gutter for his cap, and putting it on his head.

"They're a precious set 'o rascals," the girl continued. "They come to th' theater to-night t' break up the show, and when I was singin' kept a-yellin' out, 'Open yer mouth wider!' and when I begin dancin' yelled, 'Kick higher!' I just wish I had my way with 'em. I'd tie the last one on 'em up, an' cow-

hide 'em, the hateful, good-for-nothin' things."

The whole party had been gradually moving on until they came within range of the street lamp, which fell upon the face of the young woman, whom Claude recognized as a singing and dancing variety girl named Rose Palmer whom he had seen at different times when they were quartered near the larger towns. Though Rose was regarded as a little wild, she had a tender heart, and had done good service as a volunteer nurse on the battlefield. She was truthful, and Claude knew her word could be relied on.

The man who had come up in time to render valuable aid in driving away the rascals next came in for a share of his observation. He started back at sight of his face, and with an exclamation of pleasure grasped his hand and cried:

"Booth!"

"I believe we have met before."

"Yes, on more than one occasion."

"Pardon me if I fail to recall the last meeting place."

"Memphis, Tennessee, where my poor friend was slain."

"True, true!" cried Booth, grasping his hands again in a hearty clasp. "I am glad to meet you, friend, right in the dawn of this glorious peace. But let us learn who the assailants of these people were, and report them to the proper authorities."

They then turned to Rose, who was wiping the blood and dirt off Jack's face, and asked if she knew their assailants.

"I know two of 'em," she answered.

"What are their names?" Booth asked.

"Atzeroth and Payne," she answered.

At the mention of the names there was a perceptible start on the part of Booth. He turned quickly away so the light from the street lamp could not shine on his face. Claude thought nothing of it at the time, but when all the world was heaping opprobrium upon the actor's head, he remembered it.

"Who are Atzeroth and Payne?" Claude asked.

"Two loafers always hangin' around the theater. I bet they're both thieves, and then they've had it in for Jack, because when he guarded the White House grounds he drove 'em off, proddin' one with his bayonet."

"Yer right I did," Jack returned, holding his hand to his injured eye. "I wish I'd run it clean through the cuss, an' made a finish o' him; there'd a-been one rascal less."

"Come, come, Jack; we'll get even with 'em yet. You'd better go to quarters now, for I can get home, I reckin."

"No; I am goin' to show you the way, and if them fellows come a-worryin' me, why ye kin just look out for the fur to fly, that's all there is o' it."

Jack had been imbibing and was quite pugnacious; but as there was no enemy on whom he could vent his rage, he permitted himself to be dragged away by the dancing girl, shaking his fist in the air and swearing vengeance as he staggered along the street.

Claude turned his eyes to Booth's usually grave face, on which played an amused smile.

"The fellow imagines he is a Hercules and Samson rolled into one," the actor at last remarked.

"Yes; fortunately he was too drunk to appreciate that he was getting a beating."

"Those wretches who assaulted him should have been sent to jail. Though intoxicated, he was a gallant fellow in defending the girl."

"How long have you been in the city, Mr. Booth?"

Booth started suddenly, while a strange thrill ran through his frame. After a brief silence, during which he seemed undergoing a mental struggle, he said:

"About a week. Say, Captain, where are you going to-night?"

"To my hotel."

"It is yet early. Will you do me a favor?" asked Booth.

"Certainly; what is it?"

"Wait in the rotunda of your hotel

until I come for you. I want to talk with you over a matter of great moment."

Without the least hesitation, Claude freely promised to do so small a favor, and they parted, Claude going to the Willard Hotel, thinking Booth a strange man, with peculiar notions. He had been seated half an hour in the brilliantly lighted rotunda when a tall stranger with dark brown whiskers and green glasses entered and, coming up to him, asked:

"Have you seen Mr. Booth lately?" As it was not Claude's habit to give information to strangers, unless he knew the use they intended to make of it, instead of answering, he asked:

"Why do you wish to know?"

"That, sir, I decline to tell," the suspicious stranger answered. Claude looked keenly at him. He was dressed in black clothes, which seemed to have been well worn; in fact, were almost threadbare. His hands and face were dark, and showed evidence of having been tanned by mountain winds and browned by Southern suns. His dark brown hair was cut medium length and his beard well trimmed but somewhat bristly. It was difficult to distinguish the color of his eyes through his spectacles, which were a dark green. His voice was rich and deep, and he spoke with deliberate slowness. Claude completed his examination, and not caring to hold any further conversation with him, passed on to the reading room, which was deserted, and taking up a copy of a New York newspaper seated himself near a light and proceeded to read. He had not been seated two minutes when some one touched his shoulder, and looking up he saw the mysterious stranger at his side.

"I believe I asked you a question?" said the stranger.

"I am aware of the fact; good evening, sir," returned Claude, again turning his eyes toward the newspaper. The hint had no effect on the stranger, for he still stood by Claude's side.

"Why don't you go away?" asked Claude, growing a little more suspicious, but his intruder paid no attention to his remark. Claude after this kept a keen eye on him, and carefully folding the paper laid it on the table at his side, and glanced through the large window in the hope of seeing a policeman whom he could call to his aid and rid himself of this troublesome fellow. Fortunately at that moment he saw one of those guardians of the peace in blue coat, brass buttons and tab cap, coming along the street. He raised his hand to tap the window when his mysterious companion gave vent to a merry peal of laughter, and in a changed voice asked:

"Are you about to call a policeman?"

He gazed at him in speechless amazement, while the mysterious man removed his glasses and he was facing John Wilkes Booth himself. Could it be possible? What was the cause of the transformation? Why should he, the handsome, well-dressed actor, change himself into such an odd looking, poorly clad specimen of humanity?

"What in the name of Heaven is the meaning of all this?" Claude asked, with ill-suppressed excitement.

"I am safe now, since you have failed to recognize me," he replied, in a more cheerful spirit than he had shown for months. "Ha, ha, old policeman, look at me once, twice, three times if you like, for you are in the dark. I am an unknown person now to the whole world, or soon will be; but I trust you, my friend, and so disclose myself. How great is the change a person can make in his appearance if he has only studied the art. The stage is the greatest of all schools! All in keeping, you see," said he, directing Claude's attention to his old red silk handkerchief, with which he wiped his spectacles; "even my cigars are the kind suitable for my station in life. Will you have one? I must be puffing, though I hate to smoke the vile things; but the flavor of a real Havana might create a suspicion that my tastes were not in harmony with my surroundings. Detectives require no better clew sometimes than the whiff of a Havana. Ugh!

what fragrance!" he continued, as he took a light from Claude's cigar; "but *vaya*! it is only for a time. Bear in mind one thing, please; henceforth I am George W. Mason—your obedient servant, George W. Mason."

Claude still gazed on Mason, formerly Booth, but could not speak. What could have happened to make him act so strangely? He began to fear he was suffering from some mental derangement.

"Come, my friend," said he, taking Claude's arm, "let us go to your room, and there you can give me something better to smoke than this trash. My conduct must seem unnatural, but the truth is I am so contented that I am almost happy."

On reaching Claude's room, Booth carefully locked the door after them and, seating himself in a big easy chair, looked steadily at Claude and asked:

"Will you promise me, my dear friend, to say nothing about the incidents of this evening, at least for a week?" Claude promised, and he added: "Two days' silence may be sufficient, for I expect to start in twenty-four hours for Europe, never to return.

"Now, my friend," he continued, "you must not have too bad an opinion of me. All that you have seen certainly appears strange to you, and I wish I could explain everything, but I cannot. I must still leave you to doubt and wonder. I can only say that I must take this extraordinary course to save my life and my soul."

"What, you do not mean to say you have committed a crime?" asked Claude.

"Crime, no. Thank God that I can look thee in the face and say these hands are as stainless now, as when a prattling child I played about my mother's knee. But I must leave my native land. I must sink my identity in order to avoid the commission of the greatest crime ever known."

"Heavens, Mr. Booth, what do you mean?"

"No, no, don't ask for anything. I will tell you all I can—I am under a power—a spell."

"A what?" cried Claude, gazing into those wild, glaring eyes.

"Yes, yes, I know what you would say; you would say I am a madman and have me confined. But my way is best; let me get the ocean between us, and then I can defy the power that seeks to bind me down to Satan, with a soul as dark and sin-stained as Festus. In a prison I would be tortured to death, while I can hide in the Alps, in Europe, Asia or Africa, anywhere, so I can escape this influence."

"What influence?"

"Accursed influence which I can't explain. It drives me on, on, on to hell."

"What do you mean?" asked Claude, still more strongly impressed that his poor friend was on the verge of madness.

"Don't ask me to explain; I cannot. But it is all gone now." Holding up the false whiskers, wig and glasses, he continued: "In these I find my salvation. I can defy the accursed power dragging me to ruin. I can leave—sink myself into insignificance. John Wilkes Booth will disappear forever from the world, and in his place will be George W. Mason."

"Will not your acting betray you?"

"Act; why, I shall never go on the stage again."

"I thought you wedded to your profession."

"I am. I love it more than life, more than all I have, save one thing."

"What?"

"My immortal soul."

"Mr. Booth, you talk in riddles."

"I must repeat, don't expect me to explain, for it is impossible. When I leave this house John Wilkes Booth disappears forever. Not even that dear old mother, whom I love above all other beings, will know her son lives. My heart bleeds for her, but my immortal soul—my immortal soul is at stake." He struck a dramatic attitude with one hand, lifted on high, his face

turned toward heaven, while his eyes gleamed with the fires of insanity.

"My God, he is insane!" Claude moaned aloud. Booth heard him and, turning toward the young officer, replied:

"No, not mad, but soon will be, unless I break this accursed spell. But why should I care now; I can break it, it is broken. Ha, ha, ha! yes, it is broken, and though my identity is lost I have saved my honor and my soul."

He threw himself into a seat and, bowing his head in his hand, shook from head to foot as if he had a nervous chill. The seconds passed on leaden wings, each moment seeming an age. At last Booth rose to his feet, the whole expression of his face changed. He seemed almost angelic as he stood before him in the pride and glory of a noble manhood. When he spoke his voice was calm as a Summer morning.

"I have conquered; I am a man once more, and can look my fellow man in the face without the blush of shame on my cheek. The awful fire which mingled with the discharge of guns has haunted my dreams for weeks is gone, and I am now myself once more."

"Mr. Booth, you are ill; let me summon medical aid."

"No, no, my dear friend, you are mistaken. I am well. Let me explain. I have been for weeks haunted with the visions of Faust when he sold his immortal soul to Mephistopheles. I have dreamed dreams no mortal ever dared dream before, and had visions such as none other eyes ever saw. I have been for weeks in a burning house with bloodhounds howling all about me. Through the cracks I could see fiery eyes; on my cheek fell their hot breath, while the flames roared in my rear. Oh, my God, it was a vision to drive one mad, but it was only a warning of what was to come. It is gone now; I am saved. Ha, ha, ha, this is my salvation. No one will know me," and he fondled the disguise he had worn, contemplating it as an object of love. Suddenly turning on his friend, he said:

"Captain Mitchel, promise me whatever may happen to your poor friend, you will not think too hard of him."

Claude grasped his hand, and in a voice choking with emotion said:

"My poor brother, you who never did a wrong, need no forgiveness. I will always think well of you."

"Thank you. God bless you, and now farewell forever."

He grasped his hand and as if not content with that, embraced him, held him long to his breast, then suddenly breaking away, cried:

"Adieu forever!"

He was gone, and Claude sank dizzy, confused and bewildered in a chair.

In deep disguise Booth passed from the hotel and stepped out of the door on Pennsylvania Avenue. He hurried on and had turned into Fourteenth Street when he suddenly came face to face with a tall young woman whose dazzling beauty and piercing black eyes seemed to thrill his very soul. She laid her hand on his arm, and said in a low, musical voice:

"Come with me, I want to talk with you."

He started and stammered something about her being mistaken.

"No, I am not," she replied. "I know you, Mr. Booth. Come on!"

A strange tremor passed over his frame, his legs shook beneath him; but it was over in a moment, and in despair he tore off the disguise, saying:

"It is fate. Lead on and I will follow, though it be to hell itself."

CHAPTER XII.

Power of the Veiled Woman.

The old adage that "uneasy rests the head that wears the crown" is one of our most reliable truisms handed down from antiquity. The bad ruler and tyrant has just cause to fear an overthrow of power, but it is not always the bad chief executive who is in danger. Even the best sometimes become the object of this pleasure. The rest-

less spirit of certain people, prone to attribute all their misfortunes to the chief executive, may sometimes lead to brooding over imaginary wrongs, until the mind is unseated and the world shocked by assassination and horror. President Lincoln occupied a conspicuous position for the hatred of cranks and assassins from the very first. People of the South who had for years been educated to hate an abolitionist, regarded one as little better than an ordinary thief. Perhaps the time has not come to look dispassionately on the question; but when it does the world will realize that the South had some cause to look with distrust on the advocates of freedom. Unfortunately the human mind is so constituted as to judge all opposition by the lowest types and a glorious principle is overshadowed by the crimes of those claiming to advance it. In their zeal to free the negroes of the South some of the abolitionists were guilty of inciting slaves to murder their masters. The most horrible and revolting crimes were committed by vicious runaway negroes, even the murdering of helpless women and children; and the abolitionists were charged with aiding the criminals to escape instead of handing them over to justice.

These exceptional cases were taken as the rule by which the abolitionist was judged. No wonder Abraham Lincoln was hated as the chief of the great party, which permitted such crimes in the blessed name of freedom. The whole abolition party was judged by a standard of fanaticism and those who had suffered from the depredations mentioned were driven to madness by designing politicians. Unscrupulous orators and editors invariably held up the worst side of the picture, until there were thousands of good people in the South who believed that social equality and degradation would be forced on them if the abolition party came into power. The South never understood the North, nor has the North ever understood the South. It has been asserted that seventy-five per cent of the Confederate soldiers would have been loyal to the Union but for the dread of their daughters being forced to take black husbands. While this in our day seems silly, yet such doctrine had been preached and talked until it was believed. People had not learned that society cannot be regulated by legislation; they still believed it could be controlled by the party in power.

In the month of January, 1861, a gentleman in Philadelphia holding a position in that city which made him a proper agent to act on the information, was waited upon by a lady, who stated to him her suspicion or knowledge—whence derived no one was ever able to learn—of a plot to assassinate Mr. Lincoln while on his way from his home, in Illinois, to Washington, to be inaugurated as President. The active parties, or some of them, in the business were understood to be in Baltimore. A detective was employed who frustrated the plan if such a plan was contemplated. Many papers loyal to the Union at that time ridiculed the notion, but subsequent events proved there was danger of assassination from the time of his election until his death. He lived in a period and occupied a position that would breed such terrible thoughts. Some narrow-minded people, on the supposition that he was the brain and heart of the abolition party and the Union sentiment, supposed they had only to remove him and the whole fabric would fall to pieces. No historian worthy of the name has ever intimated that any of the great leaders of the Rebellion held such ideas. They realized that it was a principle and not a man they were combating, and the death of even the head of the Government would not better their cause, for there were others ready to take his place.

There was a very extraordinary indifference in the mind of Mr. Lincoln in regard to the threats of assassination which were communicated to him. Several times as he walked in the grounds about the White House, at a

late hour of the evening, conversing upon intelligence of the war with some officer, the subject was mentioned. Whenever an illusion was made to the intimations of cherished designs upon his life, he listened with apparent indifference, and expressed himself as unable to believe that anyone would be so depraved as to destroy a friend of all the people, as he felt himself to be.

An hour after John Wilkes Booth left the Willard Hotel, a vehicle in which sat the figure of a woman and man was driven from the city at a furious gait. They were provided with passports and when the guard asked why they drove so rapidly, the youth answered that the lady was going to see her brother, a soldier reported to be dying at Port Tobacco. The explanation was sufficient and they drove on.

It was nearly daylight when they reached the old tumble-down lodging house in which the mysterious Cousin Belle met the conspirators on the night before. There was no one there. The old woman whom Harold called Mother Wood, said:

"They haint been here to-day, but my boy left a letter for Cousin Belle, an' I guess yer she."

The veiled woman nodded. Mrs. Wood went to a sort of cupboard and opening it took out a carefully sealed envelope which she handed to her visitor. The veiled woman broke the seal and glanced at the contents. There was but one word written on the sheet,

"Surratt."

She tore the paper into strips and placing it on the hearth it was soon in ashes.

"Let us return at once," she said to her youthful companion.

"To the city?" he asked.

"Yes."

In five minutes they were driving slowly back toward Washington city. Scarce a word was spoken on that journey. The woman wore a veil over her face, but it did not conceal the slumbrous fires of hate which burned in her great black eyes.

It was midnight. The tall, veiled woman wended her way along a street to the house owned by the Widow Surratt. She reached the door and rang the bell. A large lady with a stern face opened it. A few whispered words passed between them and the woman was taken up to the top floor and passed along a dark hall and into an inner room at the rear of the house to which there was not an outside opening. A skylight admitted light and air, and was so high that there was very little danger of anyone eavesdropping from the top. Three men were in the apartment. A single glance sufficed to show the veiled visitor that they were the same whom she met at the old house at Port Tobacco, Harold, Payne and Atzeroth. At her entrance Harold rose and took a step toward her, but she raised her hand and a look of pain swept over his face, until she whispered a word in his ear which seemed to satisfy him, and he resumed his seat. Atzeroth, the foreigner, was holding a cross in his hand, on which he gazed with his dull red eyes gleaming with a strange and unaccountable fire. At first one would suppose him at his devotions, a second glance one would think him a fiend incarnate, designing to use the sacred relic for some evil purpose.

The veiled woman seated herself and a moment's silence prevailed; then, taking up a paper, she glanced at it. There were several names written on the document — Atzeroth, Harold, Payne, Lloyd, McDonald, Clay and Thompson. She dipped a pen in ink and added the names of Mrs. Surratt and John Wilkes Booth to the list. Then she laid down her pen and for a moment was thoughtful. At last in a clear, rich, mellow voice she asked:

"Has the Father been here?"

"No," Payne answered, in a low, sullen voice.

"He will come."

"I expect him," Payne answered. Then, after a brief silence, he added: "You'll have to take off some o' them names. They won't stand by us."

"Who?"

"McDonald and Thompson. They've weakened."

"Cowards! Well, there are enough brave men left for the work," the woman answered. She drew to her a carefully prepared map of the country, and gazed on it with eyes all eagerness and anxiety. On a road leading from the city was marked a house with the name "Lloyd" upon it. Turning to Harold, who sat near her, seldom ever taking his eyes from the face which seemed to entrance him, she asked:

"Is this the house?"

He gave an affirmative nod.

"Have you placed them there?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Two."

"That is good." Then, after a moment, added, "It is very good." There came a singular rap on the door and a tall man about seventy years of age, whose pale face and attenuated form would excite sympathy, was admitted to the apartment. At his approach all arose and the veiled woman took a step toward him, and bowing on her knees awaited his blessing. Atzeroth and Harold bowed before him while he placed his hand upon their heads, and with eyes uplifted, in an unknown tongue implored the blessing of Deity.

Payne rose and stood leaning against a heavy table, his arms folded across his massive breast, and his eyes upon the floor. Payne had been accused of having once been an outlaw. It was said he was engaged in a burglary in Kentucky, his former home, and was generally known as a desperate man. But, desperate as he was, he was under the same strange power that influenced and savaged all others. When the priest had finished his incantations, they stood in a group, and talked for a long time in whispers, then the man in sacerdotal robes rose and went away, while the others remained long in silent contemplation. The woman at last asked some questions of Harold, who answered in monosyllables, all the while like one in a trance, and seemed utterly incapable of speaking or moving save by her will and consent.

"Where is Booth?" Payne asked.

"He is in this house," said someone.

"Bring him here," the veiled woman said.

Harold rose and went from the room. A few moments later he returned with Booth. His eyes were wildly staring, his face deathly pale, but calm, and his whole being filled with that firm resolve to accomplish some desperate act. There was no evidence of either remorse or rebellion. The strong man was a pliant tool in the hands of the master spirit who had planned the whole scheme. She was talking in her low, musical voice to Atzeroth and Payne. Cousin Belle, as the veiled woman was known, studied her men, and knew how to treat with each. Atzeroth and Payne were bought with promises of great rewards.

"There is an immense fortune in this," she said. "You are both Southern in sympathy. All is not lost. All may be saved."

"Lee has surrendered," suggested Atzeroth.

"True, true; but Lee is not the embodiment of the whole Southern cause, as Lincoln is of the North. Lee will be supplanted by Johnson. Davis is the heart of the cause and will rally hundreds and thousands, equal to Lee. Let Lincoln once be removed and we will win."

"But will the South pay the reward for the dead man as they would for the living?"

"Why not?" she answered. "They fight for a cause, and that cause is all in all to them. They make no more of one man's life than another. Have not thousands died on the battlefield? Are they not dying every day? Because one man occupies an exalted position, shall his life be spared and others sacrificed? The idea that aristocracy should be spared, and common people slain like swine, is repulsive to lovers of liberty."

"But the money?" asked Payne.

"It will be paid and you will all be

rich. But to secure it you must earn it. The head of the government and all its branches must at one fell swoop be removed root and branch and in the chaos which follows the South will be the victors. Then comes the reward, which will be large and magnificent. You will all be rich men. Not only rich, but in the organization of the new Confederacy you will be great."

Booth was very pale and his eyes seemed glaring with the fires of insanity.

At last she appealed to him to stir up the lagging faith of his companions, and in his low, rich, deep voice he began to portray the glories that awaited them. He explained that war in itself was cruel. War meant to kill and maim, and that one method of warfare was as fair as another. The ultimate object of all war was to conquer.

From that very moment John Wilkes Booth became the projector of the plot against the life of President Lincoln, a man whom he had loved, and who had never done him an injury. He rolled under his tongue the sweet paragraphs of Shakespeare referring to Brutus, whom his father had delineated so well on the stage. Booth shrunk from murder until the awful, irresistible power of the woman so completely possessed his soul; then he was foremost to declare for blood. His sealed letter found at Mrs. Greene's house in which he had declared murder was not his intention, showed that before he was completely under the sway of his evil genius he only connived at captivity.

But now that the only thought that remained was murder, he urged his accomplices to nerve themselves for the battle. He devised and laid out a triumphal tour through the South. The dramatic element was never lost sight of in his designs, nor did he fail to impress on his hearers the notoriety to be enjoyed by all. After the commission of his crime, he declared it his intention to "star" through the South, and become a drawing card as much from offenses that "smelt to Heaven" as ability to delineate character. Though he shrank from his present associates as did the woman, yet he learned that tragedy in real life could no more be enacted without greasy-faced and knock-kneed supernumeraries than upon the mimic stage. The "First citizen"' who swings a stave for Marc Antony, and drinks lager beer behind the flies, is very like the bravado in real life, who murders between his cocktails. John Wilkes Booth had entered a new field of acting, though at the time all unconscious of the fact. He had passed the ordeal of the theater to enter upon the ranker stage of real life. He had assembled around him one by one cut-throats at whom his gentle soul would have revolted had that soul been his own. Much has been said of John Wilkes Booth that is untrue. Reporters for the daily press, seldom truthful, and never reliable, when following the popular vein have painted him as a devil. His act was the act of a devil, but in later years, when the smoke of carnage has cleared away and with it the prejudices of a Nation, the more charitable have thrown over the memory of the brilliant man, once so hated, the mantle of insanity.

What could please a great actor, and the son of a great actor, more than to mingle as a principal in a real conspiracy, the aims of which were pseudo-patriotic, and the ends so astounding that at its coming the whole globe would reel. The ancient world did not feel more sensitively the death of Julius Caesar than the sudden taking off of Abraham Lincoln.

Thus he thought, if he had any independent thought, and, if he did not, another thought it through him, and forced him to speak to his auditors with all the enthusiasm of one who had originally planned the matter. He felt his whole being within him changed. He no longer loved as he once had. He hated, he wanted to kill and destroy. He was completely metamorphosed, changed in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, and so radically changed that where there ran rivers of

love before, a surging ocean of hellish hate raged. His auditors seemed to catch his enthusiasm, and having none of his finer feelings and fewer of his scruples, pledged their lives to the carrying out of the infamous plans. All arrangements were made with consummate care.

The conspiracy had its own time and kept its own counsel. Murder was seldom talked of except by genteel implications; but Mr. Lincoln was alluded to as a cancer on the body politic, which must be removed even though it took heroic means. In the deep solitude of this apartment where all planned murder most foul, John Wilkes Booth grew great of stature. He had found a purpose consonant with the evil influence which drove him to his destiny; so he grew moodier, more vigilant, more plausible. The tragedian of the mock combat seemed born to handle the dagger of the assassin.

Thus he is regarded to-day. So the world will regard him until, in the fullness of time, the scales of prejudice are removed and the secrets of his previously kind heart given up.

If the world only knew that awful ordeal through which Booth had gone; if it realized how his noble young soul, when clothed in his right mind, revolted at such deeds, some tender heart would have dropped a pitying tear to the memory of the unfortunate.

Even while urging his despicable accomplices to action, there was within his breast a good monitor struggling to bring him back to himself. But he was transformed. He could see himself as another person. He could hear the devil talking through his mouth and making him say that at which his soul revolted.

"Has God forsaken me?" his spirit sometimes mentally inquired, but his good angel was overpowered by the demon controlling his fate.

"It's no use!" he at last declared. "I am lost, I am forever lost. Now to be the greatest of all criminals."

His companions were easily swayed by his eloquence, and when all gathered about the table to discuss their plans, Booth was very calm. His intellectual qualities never seemed more clear; he was shrewdness itself. He looked over the chart, drawn by the woman who had been quite silent most of the time, pointed out the route which was to be taken in the flight.

It was known that on the 14th Mr. Lincoln and most of his cabinet were to be at Ford's Theater. Then the dark and bloody deed was to be done. The woman who had been silent so long, said:

"Let us go to the theater now and inspect it, so every exit will be familiar."

"Agreed," put in Atzeroth.

Booth sat in his chair, his head leaning on his hand. She shook him, but he made no answer. He was unconscious. She dismissed the assembled conspirators, and gazing on the man before her, said in a low, sweet tone:

"He is mine. I own him body and spirit. Poor noble soul, I pity you, and would you could be spared; but no, though it tear out the heart of my best beloved, and fling it, raw and quivering, at my feet, the oath of the vendetta shall be kept, and my brother's murder avenged!"

To be Continued.